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STEREO



DVOŘÁK

SERENADE IN E MAJOR FOR STRINGS, OP. 22

MOZART

DIVERTIMENTO IN D MAJOR, K. 136



Princeton Chamber Orchestra
Nicholas Harsanyi, conductor

DVOŘÁK: *Serenade in E Major for Strings, Op. 22*

MOZART: *Divertimento in D Major, K. 136*

PRINCETON CHAMBER ORCHESTRA • NICHOLAS HARSANYI, Conductor

THE PRINCETON CHAMBER ORCHESTRA is composed of 21 string players, each an experienced soloist or chamber musician of outstanding attainments. Formed by NICHOLAS HARSANYI in 1964, the orchestra was quickly recognized as one of the finest ensembles of its kind. Reviewing its New York debut in April, 1965, *The New York Times* said: "Well trained, spick and span, precise in attack, responsive in dynamics, it is able to approach music of any kind with confidence." Mr. Har-

sanyi's inspired leadership, plus extensive rehearsal and the same attention to phrasing, tonal blend and interpretation that mark the finest string quartets, are responsible for the orchestra's musical achievements. A former violist with the Lener and Roth quartets, Mr. Harsanyi is a member of the faculties of the Westminster Choir College and Princeton University, as well as the conductor of symphony orchestras in Princeton and Trenton, New Jersey.

Give or take a few percentage points within the normal curve so beloved of social science, a developmental psychologist can predict with remarkable accuracy when any infant will begin to crawl, talk, and walk. But no one has yet quantified the growth of artistic genius. In this highly select population there are no parameters, no standard deviations. The emergence of a creative impulse will proceed at whatever velocity its own homeostasis dictates.

These musings are not altogether irrelevant. Consider: if Schubert and Mozart and Dvořák, say, had been exact contemporaries, Schubert would be dead and Mozart would be writing his most profound masterworks at the time of life when Dvořák composed his longingly lovely and utterly guileless *Serenade for Strings*. On the other hand a Verdi would have produced hardly anything worthy of his name, and the greatest of all his works would not be forthcoming for another forty-six years!

In short, Antonín Dvořák was a late bloomer. He set down his Op. 22 when he was not quite thirty-four, in May of 1875 (Schubert died at thirty-one, Mozart at thirty-five), but in the perspective of his career it was neither an early work nor a "middle" one but rather a crucial one. For this was the year in which Dvořák came into his own as a composer after something over two decades of preparing himself. And it was his particular good fortune that the world discovered him at just this moment of readiness.

"The world" consisted, in this context, of two influential strangers who knew Dvořák only through his craft. But they could recognize mastery when they saw it—and "saw" is literally correct in this instance. For it was in the course of wading through stacks of scores submitted by "young, poor, and talented... musicians in the Austrian half of the [Hapsburg] Empire" that the State Prize judges for 1875 were won over completely by the music of a totally unknown entrant from Prague (remember that Bohemia was then still subsumed under the Viennese monarchy). As fate would have it, the judges were Johannes Brahms, already a famous composer, and Eduard Hanslick, powerful critic of the *Neue freie Presse*.

From that year forward, Dvořák's future was as much assured as it had been dubious before. And yet one suspects that Dvořák knew how ready he was. By nature cautious and conservative, he had nevertheless quit the security of his violist's chair in the Czech National Theater during 1873 to take an organ job that would give him more time to compose. Then he had married, with every intention of raising a large family. As the slightly unscrupulous publisher Fritz Simrock was soon to discover, here was one creative husband who was

determined to support a rapidly expanding household and to maintain artistic independence notwithstanding economic pressures. He would achieve his enviable status, and much more besides, by holding to a ratio of prudence and productivity which he arrived at as a young man and from which he never wavered.

That order of straightforwardness is only the least of the felicities in Dvořák's only *Serenade for Strings*, which is laid out in five movements as follows.

The opening *Moderato* (E major) at once sets the over-all tone of the work with an undulating theme of melting expressiveness and unashamed youthful ardor. There is an impulsively rhythmic middle section, but its repeat sustains what Otakar Sourek once described as "the atmosphere of twilight and sweet desire," and the concluding pages are full of uncomplicated poetry and rich harmonic coloration.

Although the *Tempo di Valse* (C sharp minor) will not fail to evoke the Chopin prototype, it is not really a waltz but a fully developed scherzo, complete with trio. And its air is anything but Chopinesque. Such markings as *dolce* and *dolente* give it a quality of restrained passion and slightly awkward tenderness which is pure Dvořák.

Again a *Scherzo*, but this time so designated, is the third movement (*Vivace*, F major). Here the dreamy mood gives way to a mischievous gaiety, although there is a broadly developed middle section (actually another trio) of contrasting, almost sensual, lyricism.

The slow movement (*Larghetto*, A major) is a superbly wrought, deeply affecting nocturne. Sourek has it that "smoldering passion" and the "enobling power of love" dominate these pages, and who is to say him nay? The theme is indeed "throbbing," and certainly the livelier central section serves not so much to break the spell as to strengthen it, "as if a light breeze were to ruffle the surface of the deep tranquility of night."

In vivid contrast to all that has gone before, the Finale (*Allegro vivace*, E major) is a surfeit of high spirits and harmonic horseplay, with doubtless deliberate if thinly veiled allusions to Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony and the most daring array of modulations. Dvořák's conception of sonata form is arresting. The first two of his three themes almost never turn up in the tonic key, which is belatedly established by the third theme (prophetic of the "Slavonic Dances" soon to come). Then, when one expects development, one hears instead of fond reminiscence of the *Larghetto* melody on the cello—is Dvořák saying something to us here? Or shortly afterward, when the initial theme of the opening movement

is recalled? Only then, in any event, does the main theme of the Finale land squarely on the tonic, and moments later we are whirled precipitantly to the end.

By way of transition backward in time from Dvořák to the Mozart of K. 136, it is perhaps obligatory to remind ourselves that by the middle of the nineteenth century composers were writing for a public, whereas in Mozart's day they were dependent on the vagaries of patronage. So Dvořák's choosing to call his Op. 22 a "Serenade" does not equate it with the *Unterhaltungsmusik* which includes K. 136.

This impressive term refers to the "occasional" pieces variously entitled serenade, cassation, nocturno, partita, and divertimento which Mozart composed to order in sizable quantity. Virtually all of them were intended for imperfect performance near the noble dinner table, or perhaps at a wedding reception. In a very real sense they were the equivalent of what we would expect to encounter these days over the tinkle of glasses in a supper club, which is to say not for concentrated listening. But that blunt truth does not begin to delineate the delights in which they abound.

So saying, it is now necessary to add that at least one Mozart scholar refused to place the K. 136 (and its companions, K. 137/8) in the *Unterhaltungsmusik* category. True, the Köchel catalogue unequivocally calls them Divertimenti, but Alfred Einstein insists that "this designation could not have come from Mozart himself... For a divertimento should have two minuets, and these... have no minuets at all." What Einstein implies is that the K. 136/8 are in fact string quartets, although "symphonic" in the Italian manner, should Milan—whither the sixteen-year-old Mozart and his father were returning shortly after these works were composed in 1772—be in the market for new orchestral repertoire, for the mere addition of oboes and horns as doubling instruments could make them symphonies.

Georges de Saint-Foix, among other authorities, concludes on the aggregate internal evidence that the year 1772 marked an "extraordinary" coming of age in the Mozart aesthetic. The charming little K. 136 lends credence to this proposition, but it hardly seems fair to impose such a burden of proof on a single short work when the same year produced an opera (*Lucio Silla*) and no less than seven symphonies—at least one of which, the K. 133, is by general assent a masterpiece.

Whether or not the K. 136 deserves this order of encomium, it is something more than one has any right to expect from a lad of high-school age, and dramatic support for the hypothesis that creative genius conforms to no calendar in its gestation.

James Lyons

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STEREOPHONIC

Dvořák

Serenade in E Major for Strings, Op. 22

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- Band 1. I. Moderato
- Band 2. II. Tempo di Valse
- Band 3. III. Scherzo: Vivace
- Band 4. IV. Larghetto

Princeton Chamber Orchestra
Nicholas Harsanyi, conductor

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STEREOPHONIC

Dvořák

Serenade in E Major for Strings, Op. 22 (con'd.)

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MOZART

Divertimento in D Major, K. 136

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Band 4. III. Presto

Princeton Chamber Orchestra
Nicholas Harsanyi, conductor